Education Act Amendments Improve Accountability

Department of Education

News Releases

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A new pilot project -- designed to increase school board accountability and give communities a greater voice in classroom issues -- is part of a series of Education Act amendments introduced in the House of Assembly today.

Other amendments extend the date for teacher layoff notices, add an African-Canadian member to regional and district school boards, and introduce limited fees for teacher certificates, renewals and replacements.

The pilot project for the Southwest regional school board is designed to give communities a greater voice in their school board while increasing school board accountability for spending and results.

This winter, a school board boundary task force recommended replacing the Southwest regional school board with more management at the school level.

Instead of replacing the school board, the legislation proposes to create two smaller, elected district school boards to focus on program issues. A chief executive officer will handle administration and operations, and report to the deputy minister of Education. Each district board will have a director of education responsible for educational programs. The CEO and directors of education will no longer be members of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

Under the proposed amendments, these provisions could be applied to other school boards in future. The amendments also strengthen the minister's authority to remove a school board if education standards are not being met. The minister already has this authority for financial, health and safety or educational welfare concerns.

Education Minister Jane Purves said this legislation strikes the right balance.

"On the one hand, we are giving communities in Southwest a greater voice, particularly on classroom issues," Ms. Purves said. "We also need to build accountability between government, which writes the cheques, and school boards, which spend them. This pilot project explores ways we can build this accountability, both for spending and results in the classroom.

"We also want to find ways to move every possible dollar from

administration to the classroom," said the minister. "This is another objective we can pursue through the pilot project."

Another significant amendment extends the school board deadline for issuing layoff notices from May 15 to June 16 for this year only. As well, an amendment revokes layoff notices already issued, effective immediately.

"I said there should be no teacher lay offs as a result of this budget, and I mean it," said the minister. "We're back at the table, working through these issues with school boards. Teachers should not have to cope with the stress of a layoff notice unnecessarily, as the process continues.

The amendments also provide for an elected African-Canadian representative on each regional and district school board in Nova Scotia -- a first in Canada. The 1994 Black Learners Advisory Committee Report on Education identified a need for more representation for African-Nova Scotians in the education system.

"This legislation will give the African-Canadian community in Nova Scotia the opportunity to participate in the planning and decision making at the school board level," said Ms. Purves.

The fourth key initiative will provide for fees to cover the administrative costs of processing certification applications for first-time teachers in Nova Scotia, or those who are renewing their certification. Nova Scotia will join all other Canadian provinces, with the exception of Quebec, in the charging of fees for this service. These fees also remain well under those existing for other professional certification. These fees will apply only to those starting their careers or transferring from other provinces.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

The Nova Scotia government has introduced legislation revoking all layoff notices handed to teachers this year.

It's also extending the deadline for issuing layoff notices from May 15th to June 16th for this year only.

The changes are part of several amendments to the Education Act.

The major change involves a pilot project for the large Southwest regional school board.

It will be split into two district boards under a C-E-O for

operations who will report directly to the deputy minister.

Each board will have a Director of Education responsible for education programs.

The changes could be applied to other school boards in the future.

Education Minister Jane Purves says the amendments give communities a greater voice in classroom issues.

It also provides for more accountability between the government which writes the cheques and the school boards which spend the money.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Backgrounders on the amendments to the Education Act are available; telephone collect 902-424-4492 or e-mail Release@gov.ns.ca for copies.

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